

Illinois Differentiated Monitoring and Support Visit Summary and Next Steps

August 29-31, 2016

Focus Area: Results DMS Designation: Intensive	Focus Area: State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) DMS Designation: None¹
Background: <p>On April 26, 2016, OSEP issued the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) a Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) notice that specified engagement activities that OSEP would conduct with the State, in Summer 2016, across four areas: Results, Compliance, Dispute Resolution, and Fiscal. Under Results, Illinois was identified for intensive engagement activities based on Illinois FFY 2013 APR data for math and reading proficiency, and participation rates of children with disabilities on statewide assessments.</p> <p>During conversations with the State, ISBE explained that because they had been functioning without a State Director of Special Education for approximately one and a half years, the special education offices had experienced difficulty communicating and collaborating with other offices regarding much of their work and planning efforts. However, in August 2016 the State was assigned a new Director of Special Education and an immediate, cooperative partnership between Special Education and Teaching and Learning (General Education) has been established, as reported during the visit.</p>	
DMS Notice Factors for Results: <p>Participation of children with disabilities (CWD) on regular statewide assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8th grade Reading and Math - 89% <p>Performance of CWD on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4th grade Reading - 26% scoring at basic or above• 8th grade Reading - 32% scoring at basic or above• 4th grade Math - 45% scoring at basic or above• 8th grade Math - 29% scoring at basic or above	
Topics Addressed During Monitoring and Support Activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration• Staffing/Organizational Composition• State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)• SSIP and SPDG Alignment• Braiding and Blending Funds• Needs Assessment• Use of Technical Assistance (TA) and Resources	

¹ OSEP did not make designations for the SSIP during this DMS period.

Discussion Summary

In conversations with OSEP before the visit, the State had identified issues that were creating challenges in the State's development and implementation of its SSIP, and in the State's efforts to improve results for students with disabilities. These included barriers to collaboration within ISBE, and staffing challenges (e.g., high turnover, vacant positions, and reorganization). As well the need to align the State's work under its State Professional Development Grant (SPDG), its SSIP, and other efforts to improve results (including the "braiding" and "blending" of grant funds).

Some of the key focus areas that OSEP and the State addressed during the DMS visit included:

SSIP: The State acknowledged it still has to finish a significant amount of work to complete Phase III of its SSIP by the due date of April 3, 2017. In support of continuous efforts to refine and fully implement the SSIP, ISBE and OSEP worked collaboratively to identify action steps for the State to complete after the conclusion of the visit. Those action steps included engaging stakeholders in an additional meeting to discuss the current State Identified Measurable Result (SIMR) and possible revisions to the SIMR resulting from discussions between OSEP and ISBE during the visit. Also, development of a SSIP implementation plan (criteria for identifying districts, selection process, improvement strategies, the area of focus, etc.). In preparation for the stakeholder meeting, the State will review data sources and ensure the integrity of the data generated from their new State data system. During the visit, the State described its implementation of a new data system with LEA/District and State-level reporting capabilities. The State is optimistic about the usefulness of the new system in its SSIP and SPDG activities.

SSIP/SPDG: The State had previously delayed SPDG implementation activities that would help it reach its SIMR and SPDG goals and objectives. Reasons for the delay included central office staff vacancies, misalignment between a school improvement TA contract and the new/intended SPDG grant focus areas, and barriers in collaborating across State offices to support both the SPDG and the SSIP. During the visit, the State disclosed a new Organizational/Staffing chart, which demonstrated that ISBE was successful in filling some vacancies that existed during the months preceding the visit. The State also revealed additional plans as well as new challenges. ISBE plans to form a collaborative entity (comprised of general and special education) to implement the State's SPDG which will also help the State to achieve its SIMR. However, the formation of the collaborative entity is on hold while the State awaits a new Request for Proposals (RFP) for their Multi-tiered System of Support that would allow them to braid funds State-wide to support collaboration.

In response to the State's request for guidance, OSEP provided TA regarding bridging support between grant funding streams with consideration for the current SPDG spending requirements. Also, OSEP provided TA on leveraging resources/funds, and analyzing data (e.g. overlapping districts in consideration of SSIP and SPDG efforts). During the visit, the OSEP SPDG Project Officer introduced the State to the use of "transformation zones" which encompassed overall planning and timelines and an outline of a District selection plan (protocol/criteria for selecting districts, assessing readiness, and evaluating LEA commitment).

Further discussion between OSEP and ISBE revealed needs such as identifying evidence-based practices for use in the implementation of both the SSIP and SPDG. OSEP will continue to provide TA for implementation planning including the use of resources that the State currently has under development. Also, OSEP will support the State's efforts in developing professional development modules for the SSIP and SPDG.

Use of TA and Resources: Some of the needs identified by ISBE before, during, and after the OSEP visit included the need for selection of evidence-based practices and making connections between all of the current projects (SPDG projects, SSIP, etc.). There was agreement the State needed additional support in the development and implementation of its SSIP. As an outcome of the discussion with OSEP and current TA providers, the State requested to participate in the Language and Literacy Council's Results collaboration to support its Results work. To support the SSIP and all of the State's results improvement efforts, the State has formed a partnership between ISBE's Special Education and Teaching and Learning (General Education) components. The State reported that it currently has access to resources from other investments and that it will continue to work to utilize those resources to support alignment between projects designed to improve results for students with disabilities.

Next Steps

During FFY 2016, OSEP will conduct the following TA activities with the State to support ISBE's work on Results and the SSIP:

1. Assist the State with planning for a stakeholder meeting to address the creation of Phase III of their SSIP and refinements, if necessary, to their SIMR based on information shared during the OSEP visit
2. Discuss the status of the implementation of the State's new data system and how it can support the State's ability to collect, retrieve, and analyze data for the SSIP and SPDG
3. Provide guidance on how the offices that comprise the collaborative entity can partner to implement the SPDG and SSIP
4. Support the State's efforts in developing professional development modules and in refining the current tools and resources that are underway to support the SPDG and SSIP

OSEP will meet with the State on January 12, 2017 to finalize the TA schedule and begin work to support the development of the Phase III SSIP.